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ABSTRACT

The continuing growth in the number of foreign students attending colleges in the United States calls for increased understanding of international students' adjustment conflicts and help-seeking behavior. A study was conducted to investigate contrasted preferences for 14 help-giver resources of 95 Asian students with preferences of 49 American students for both emotional and vocational problems, using nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis and Friedman techniques. Asian subjects were from Hong Kong, the Republic of China, and Thailand. All subjects completed a demographic data sheet and ranked, in order of preference, a list of 14 potential help-sources they would consult for assistance if faced with a personal-emotional or educational-vocational problems. Friends, parents, and relatives were consistently preferred help sources for personal-emotional problems irrespective of the students' sex or country of origin. Although no differences reached significance, some hints in preference patterns seemed to emerge. (Author/NB)

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# Help-Giver Preference Patterns in American and International Asian Students

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## Abstract

The continuing growth in foreign students attending U.S. colleges calls for increased understanding of international students' adjustment conflicts and help-seeking behavior. This investigation contrasted preferences for 14 help-giver resources of 95 Asian students with preferences of 49 U.S. students for both emotional and vocational problems, using nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis and Friedman techniques. Universities' investment in specialized service systems and training for unique student groups is reviewed in light of the absence of differential student preference patterns.

# Help-Giver Preference Patterns in American and International Asian Students[1]

In the 1983-84 academic year American colleges and universities enrolled over 338,000 international students. While Iran served as the leading country of origin of international students in the late 1970s, Taiwan has currently assumed that position (Adams, Julian, & Van Laan, 1984). Albeit international students comprised less than three percent of all students attending American colleges and universities in 1980, international students are expected to account for 10% of college enrollments by the early 1990s (Scully, 1981). As these students will constitute a notable segment of the college student population, it is important for counselors to acquaint themselves to the diversity of acclimatization issues, cultural values, potential conflicts, and help-seeking patterns of these emerging student subcultures. Success in pursuit of higher education for international students will depend not only on their native academic aptitudes but also on their capacities to adapt to a different culture.

International students reluctance to use services of professional help-givers has been conceptualized as an indication of cultural differences in attitudes toward seeking help (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Sue & Sue, 1977; Tan, 1967). Relative to American students, Ka-Wai Yuen and

Tinsley (1981) reported that Chinese, Iranian, and African students considered it more appropriate to assume a passive role in relation to a counselor whom they expect to be a directive and nurturing authority. Dadfar & Friedlander (1982) found that international students of Western extractions (i.e., Europe and Latin America) held more positive attitudes toward seeking professional help than non-Western (i.e., African and Asian) students.

Atkinson, Ponterotto, and Sanchez (1984) reported that American students generally held more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help than Vietnamese students. However, irrespective of ethnic background women showed more tolerance for the stigma associated with psychological help than men did. Tan (1967) also found that international students from Asian countries held similar expectancies for counseling albeit differences existed between Asians and Americans.

In contrast to comparing expectancies and attitudes toward counseling, the present study assessed international and American students' preferences for various help-givers. Investigators have assessed patterns of preferences for help-seekers in American students (Christianson, Birk, Brooks, & Sedlacek, 1976; Christianson & Magoon, 1974; Tinsley, de St. Aubin, & Brown, 1982; Snyder, Hill, & Derksen, 1972; Webster & Fretz, 1978). However, efforts to

determine such patterns in international student samples are more sparse and have received less systematic scrutiny. Though not formally investigating help-givers preferences, Tan (1967) noted that students from Asian countries (Turkey, Arab countries, India, China, Japan) tend to use parents most commonly for career choice problems while American students use a counselor. Atkinson et al. (1984) compared Vietnamese and American students rank ordering of help-providers whom they would consult for a personal problem. Both student groups ranked a friend first. Vietnamese students subsequent preference was an older relative while Americans chose a psychologist-counselor second.

The decision to investigate preferences for help-sources arose since studies of international students have focused, for the most part, on expectancies for counseling and attitudes concerning psychological help (e.g. Atkinson et al., 1984; Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Ka-Wai Yuen & Tinsley, 1981; Tan, 1967). International students' perceptions or preferences for diverse service providers has received only cursory and tangential attention (Atkinson et al., 1984; Tan, 1967), while the range of helpers investigated in these studies has been limited.

The present investigation studied international students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Thailand since (a)

these nations have been among leading countries of origin for international students studying in the United States since 1970 and (b) students from South and East Asia currently constitute the largest constituency of international students studying in the United States (Adams et al., 1984). For comparison, a sample of American students was included. Given the salience of parental and family ties in Asian students' advice seeking for problems (Atkinson et al., 1984; Tan, 1967), it was anticipated that Asian and American students would differ in their respective preference hierarchies for help-givers.

## Method

### Subjects

The international Asian students consisted of 10 males and 10 females from Hong Kong (HK), 11 males and 20 females from the Republic of China (RC) and 21 males and 23 females from Thailand (THAI) enrolled in a large southwestern university. The mean ages for the Asian males and females were, respectively, 26.5 (*SD* = 4.9) and 24.2 (*SD* = 3.2) years. Nineteen males and 30 females from the United States (US) with respective mean ages of 22.7 (*SD* = 3.6) and 22.3 (*SD* = 4.5) years also participated.

### Procedure

The present data were collected in conjunction with a study of international students. The primary investigation

was a mail survey of a sample of international students from all countries who enrolled in a large Southwestern university. The original aim was to obtain a sample of twenty-five male and female international students from a number of countries (including HK, RC, and THAI) via the mail with one follow up to non-responders.

American (U.S.) students responded to announcements made in undergraduate psychology courses that they could earn extra credit for research participation by reporting to a specific location at a designated time to serve as a subject in a survey of university students. All U.S students who reported were included.

All subjects completed a demographic data sheet and ranked, in order of preference, a list of 14 potential help-sources they would consult for assistance if faced with personal-emotional or an educational-vocational problem. To control for possible order effects in subjects' rankings, two counterbalancing procedures were used. First, half of the subjects ranked the list in regard to personal-emotional problems and then with respect to educational-vocational problems while the remaining participants made their rankings for the two types of problems in reverse order. Second, within each problem category the 14 help-sources were presented in one of three different orders.

Construction of the list of help sources investigated was guided by several considerations. First, studies of American students' preferences for help-givers have encompassed a broad range of service providers (Christianson & et al., 1976; Christianson & Magoon, 1974; Tinsley et al., 1982; Webster & Fretz, 1978) while studies of international students have used limited lists (Atkinson et al., 1984; Tan, 1967). The present study, incorporated help-givers from lists used by Christianson and her colleagues (1976, 1974) and Webster and Fretz (1978) with the restriction that no titles were used which indicated the providers' sex or age. Second, since universities with sizeable international student enrollments commonly have an international student office, "international student advisor" was included on the list of helpers in the present study. Finally, Tinsley et al. (1982) reported that for either personal or career concerns the majority of students would probably not seek help from a professional counselor. Students may feel they can deal with problems by themselves or doubt whether a counselor can help at all. To investigate the relative influence of students' reluctance to seek out help, the alternative "no one" was included in the list of help-givers. Table 1 contains the list of help-sources students received.

## Results

The distribution of rankings attributed to each help source was tabulated. For each help-source the numerical value of the case found at the 50th percentile of the distribution was designated as the median rank for the particular help source. The fourteen median ranks were ordered such that the lowest median (most preferred help-source students would consult) was assigned the first rank and the next highest median (participants' second preferred resource) was assigned second rank. This procedure was continued until the highest median (students' least preferred help-source) received the rank of 14.[2] Tables 1 and 2 present the obtained medians from the distribution of rankings and the assigned ranks under personal-social problem and educational-vocational problem

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Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

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conditions, respectively.

To examine the impact of students' backgrounds (country of origin and sex), Kruskal-Wallis one way analysis of variance for independent samples (Siegel, 1956) was used to compare different groups assigned ranks of help-resources for each problem type. Comparisons of rankings by student subgroups for each problem type were made (US, HK, RC, and THAI students; US and all Southeast

Asian students; males and females). The first group of Kruskal-Wallis analyses involved rankings by each sex across countries of origin, thus: (a) US, HK, RC, and THAI males, (b) US, HK, RC, and THAI females, (c) US and all Southeast Asian males, and (d) US and all Southeast Asian females; the second group of analyses examined effects of sex within each country of origin, thus: (a) US males and US females; (b) HK males and HK females; (c) RC males and RC females; (d) THAI males and THAI females; and (e) all Southeast Asia males and Southeast Asia females.

Table 1 presents the group median values and rank orders of the help-givers by each country of origin for peraonal-emotional problems. The observed Kruskal-Wallis values for each of the comparisons across countries were: US, HK, RC, and THAI males ($\underline{H}$ = .094); US, HK, RC, and THAI females ($\underline{H}$ = .140); US and all Southeast Asia males ($\underline{H}$ = .002); and US and all Southeast females ($\underline{H}$ = .005). The observed Kruskal-Wallis values for sex comparisons within each country were: US males and US females ($\underline{H}$ = .005); HK males and HK females ($\underline{H}$ = .042); RC males and RC females ($\underline{H}$ = .076); THAI males and THAI females ($\underline{H}$ = .053); and all Southeast Asia males and all Southeast Asia females ($\underline{H}$ = .013).

Table 2 presents the median values and ranks for the educational-vocational concerns. The obtained Kruskall-Wallis values for comparisons across countries were: US, HK, RC,

and THAI males ($\underline{H}$ = .097); US, HK, RC, and THAI females ($\underline{H}$ = .156); US males and all Southeast Asia males ($\underline{H}$ = .540); US females and all Southeast Asia females ($\underline{H}$ = .001). Sex comparisons within countries yielded the following Kruskal-Wallis values US males and US females ($\underline{H}$ = .026); HK males and HK females ($\underline{H}$ = .064); RC males and RC females ($\underline{H}$ = .005); THAI males and THAI females ($\underline{H}$ = .153); and all Southeast Asia males and all Southeast Asia females ($\underline{H}$ = 1.022).

Since none of the above comparisons reached significance, a Friedman two-way analyses of variance for repeated measures (Siegel, 1956) tested whether or not for the total sample of students' rankings the help-givers differed for the two problem types.[3] Friedman results revealed no differences in students preferences for help sources for the two types of problems, $X_r^2(1) = 1.8$. Table 3 shows the rankings subjects assigned help-givers for both

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Insert Table 3 about here

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personal-social and educational-vocational problems. For both types of problems, students included the same help sources in their first six preferences: faculty, friend, parent, relative, counseling center, and international

student advisor. Only faculty shifted more than one rank for the two problem areas.

## Discussion

This study compared help-giver preferences of US and international students from three South and East Asia countries. The list of help-givers sampled specific sources of help used in studies of American students. Contrary to expectation, no differences were found in preference rankings among students from various countries, between males and females from any country, or between preference rankings for personal-social or educational-vocational problems.

While no differences occurred, some hints in preference patterns seemed to emerge. Friends, parents, and relatives were consistently preferred help sources for personal-emotional problems irrespective of the students' sex or country of origin. As one might anticipate, international students favored international student advisor more than US students did. Similar hints emerged from the preferences for helpers under the educational-vocational problem with the exception that faculty member/academic advisor assumed a more prominent position in the rankings.

The preference rankings for helpers under each of the two problem categories produced no differences. However

students most preferred help sources seem to exhibit an invariant quality. Were it not for the differential preference for the faculty/academic advisor under the two problem categories, students' first six rankings appear identical. Interestingly, consulting no one or using a phone crisis service seemed an unlikely option to the students when faced with either type of problem.

The present results offer some interesting implications. As no significant differences in preferences emerged, individuals in policy making positions might find comfort in the fact that, for the moment, no evidence was forthcoming to demonstrate any specific need to have available particular types of professional help-givers to tend to Asian international students' personal-emotional or educational-vocational needs. However, further studies will be necessary to substantiate whether such a generalization might be applicable to all international student groups and to determine whether such a generalization might be limited by geographical and contemporary times.

Another interpretation of the failure to detect differences would imply that South and East Asian students acclimate, sensitize, and adapt their help seeking preferences to patterns of their US student peers. However this raises questions of whether Asian internationals do this differently than international students from other

non-Asian countries or whether Asian internationals simply acclimate more rapidly than other international student groups.

Other studies of international students have involved comparative differences in attitudes about seeking professional help and counseling. Considering the results from the present study, one could possibly conclude that efforts directed to international students should be directed at influencing their attitudes and expectations rather than attempting to educate or sensitize them about various professional and/or technical differences between various help-giver resources. While international and US students seem homogeneous in their preferences for help-givers, previous research indicates greater certainty that these international students do differ in their attitudes about seeking out help for psychological problems.

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## Footnotes

[1]This study was supported by a grant from North Texas State University International Student Support Services.

[2]In cases where the distributions of rankings of two or more help-givers resulted in identical medians, the tied help-givers were assigned the same rank.

[3]For this analysis the subject sample shrank because some students failed to rank the help-givers for both the personal-social and educational-vocational problem topics. The Kruskal-Wallis statistics were computed for the reduced sample and, again, all comparisons were insignificant.

Table 1

Rank Order and Median Values of Student Subgroup Help-giver Sources for Personal-Emotion Problems

| | Males | | | | Females | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | US | HK | RC | THAI | US | HK | RC | THAI |
| Student Mental Health Serivce | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 8.30 | 10.50 | 9.33 | 8.50 | 8.38 | 9.00 | 7.50 | 6.83 |
| Rank | 8 | 11.50 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| Physican | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 7.50 | 8.50 | 11.50 | 8.67 | 8.81 | 9.50 | 9.50 | 10.25 |
| Rank | 6 | 8 | 12.50 | 8.50 | 9 | 9 | 10.50 | 10 |
| Clergyman/Minister | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 4.90 | 7.67 | 9.00 | 10.50 | 6.63 | 5.00 | 11.13 | 12.50 |
| Rank | 4 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 14 | 13 |
| Residence Hall Counselor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 11.38 | 10.50 | 8.00 | 8.67 | 10.50 | 10.50 | 10.75 | 11.50 |
| Rank | 13 | 11.5 | 8 | 8.5 | 11.5 | 10 | 13 | 11.5 |
| No One | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 5.75 | 3.50 | 13.50 | 11.00 | 13.17 | 11.00 | 9.50 | 11.50 |
| Rank | 5 | 3.5 | 14 | 12 | 13 | 11.5 | 10.5 | 12 |
| Friend | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 2.58 | 2.33 | 2.00 | 2.60 | 2.55 | 1.50 | 2.21 | 2.30 |
| Rank | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Community Mental Health Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 9.70 | 11.50 | 10.50 | 10.83 | 9.63 | 11.00 | 9.63 | 9.38 |
| Rank | 10 | 13 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 11.5 | 12 | 9 |

Table 1--Continued

| | Males | | | | Females | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | US | HK | RC | THAI | US | HK | RC | THAI |
| Private Practice Therapist | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 9.75 | 9.00 | 11.50 | 11.50 | 7.13 | 12.00 | 8.88 | 9.17 |
| Rank | 11 | 9 | 12.5 | 13 | 5 | 14 | 8 | 8 |
| Parent | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 3.36 | 2.50 | 2.67 | 3.50 | 3.10 | 3.66 | 3.17 | 2.50 |
| Rank | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2.5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2.5 |
| International Student Advisor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 13.75 | 7.50 | 4.50 | 5.20 | 13.72 | 6.50 | 7.17 | 6.50 |
| Rank | 14 | 5.5 | 4 | 5 | 14 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Telephone Crisis Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 11.25 | 13.33 | 11.00 | 12.40 | 10.50 | 11.50 | 9.25 | 12.75 |
| Rank | 12 | 14 | 11 | 14 | 11.5 | 13 | 9 | 14 |
| Relative | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 4.83 | 3.50 | 2.75 | 3.50 | 3.79 | 3.33 | 3.70 | 4.50 |
| Rank | 3 | 3.5 | 3 | 2.5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Faculty Member/ Academic Advisor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 9.50 | 9.50 | 5.75 | 4.67 | 8.50 | 7.50 | 5.75 | 6.83 |
| Rank | 9 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 6.5 | 4 | 4 |
| University Counseling Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 7.70 | 7.50 | 7.50 | 7.40 | 7.50 | 7.50 | 8.50 | 6.83 |
| Rank | 7 | 5.5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6.5 | 7 | 6 |

Table 2

Rank Order and Median Values of Student Subgroup Help-giver Sources for Educational-Vocational Problems

| Help Source | Males | | | | Females | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | US | HK | RC | THAI | US | HK | RC | THAI |
| Student Mental Health Service | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 10.33 | 12.50 | 9.75 | 8.60 | 9.94 | 10.50 | 9.83 | 9.80 |
| Rank | 11 | 14 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9.5 | 8.5 | 9 |
| Physican | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 9.50 | 10.50 | 11.50 | 10.50 | 10.36 | 10.50 | 9.83 | 10.50 |
| Rank | 9 | 10 | 11.5 | 12 | 10 | 9.5 | 8.5 | 11 |
| Clergyman/Minister | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 10.25 | 8.83 | 7.75 | 10.00 | 8.31 | 7.75 | 11.50 | 12.50 |
| Rank | 10 | 9 | 7 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 12 | 13.5 |
| Residence Hall Counselor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 8.33 | 8.50 | 8.50 | 8.50 | 6.69 | 10.25 | 10.30 | 11.20 |
| Rank | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7.5 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 12 |
| No One | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 7.50 | 6.50 | 12.50 | 8.50 | 13.75 | 13.17 | 7.50 | 10.00 |
| Rank | 6 | 7 | 13 | 7.5 | 14 | 13.5 | 7 | 10 |
| Friend | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 4.40 | 3.25 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 3.38 | 1.00 | 2.61 | 3.25 |
| Rank | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1.5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Community Mental Health Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 10.50 | 11.50 | 10.75 | 10.40 | 11.08 | 12.25 | 11.83 | 9.50 |
| Rank | 12 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 7.5 |

Table 2--Continued

| | Males | | | | Females | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Help Source | US | HK | RC | THAI | US | HK | RC | THAI |
| Private Practice Therapist | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 9.00 | 12.17 | 13.00 | 11.83 | 9.17 | 13.17 | 12.50 | 9.50 |
| Rank | 8 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 8 | 13.5 | 14 | 7.5 |
| Parent | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 3.40 | 2.75 | 3.50 | 5.33 | 3.08 | 5.50 | 3.50 | 2.80 |
| Rank | 2 | 1.5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5.5 | 3 | 1 |
| International Student Advisor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 11.00 | 6.38 | 5.25 | 4.50 | 12.17 | 4.50 | 4.88 | 4.75 |
| Rank | 13 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 12 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Telephone Crisis Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 12.67 | 11.83 | 11.50 | 11.50 | 12.44 | 11.25 | 10.75 | 12.50 |
| Rank | 14 | 12 | 11.5 | 13 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 13.5 |
| Relative | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 5.50 | 5.25 | 4.25 | 4.67 | 4.50 | 5.50 | 6.50 | 4.67 |
| Rank | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5.5 | 6 | 5 |
| Faculty Member/ Academic Advisor | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 2.66 | 2.75 | 3.25 | 2.50 | 1.00 | 2.63 | 3.25 | 3.50 |
| Rank | 1 | 1.5 | 2 | 1.5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| University Counseling Center | | | | | | | | |
| Mdn Value | 4.50 | 4.50 | 7.50 | 6.75 | 5.06 | 4.75 | 5.63 | 5.50 |
| Rank | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Table 3

Preference Hierarchy for Two Categories of Problems

| Ranking | Personal-emotional problem | Educational-vocational problem |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Friend | Faculty |
| 2 | Parent | Friend |
| 3 | Relative | Parent |
| 4 | University Counseling Center | Relative |
| 5 | International Student Advisor | University Counseling Center |
| 6 | Faculty | International Student Advisor |
| 7 | Student Mental Health Service | Residence Hall Counselor |
| 8 | Physician | Clergyman/Minister |
| 9 | Clergyman/Minister | Student Mental Health Service |
| 10 | Private Practice Therapist | Physician |
| 11 | Residence Hall Counselor | Community Mental Health Center |
| 12 | Community Mental Health Center | Private Practice Therapist |
| 13 | No one | Phone Crisis Center |
| 14 | Phone Crisis Center | No one |